

English 299: Introduction to English Studies

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INTRODUCTION/THESIS/OUTLINE

Now that you've written your annotated bibliography, which summed up what several other critics and thinkers had to say about your topic (or about issues related to your topic), it's time to turn back to your own ideas. As you researched your topic, the ideas you originally presented in your preliminary proposal might have changed or altered, as your thinking about your text and your topic might have deepened. While your proposal was speculative (you imagined what you *might* write about) at this point, you should be prepared to write about your topic in a more authoritative and definite way. The next stage in the semester-long research project is to write an introduction and thesis to your paper that sets up a critical context for your project but also makes a sophisticated argumentative claim about the text that's all your own. You should also be prepared at this point to sketch out an outline of the major points you will make in your paper.

This assignment has three required parts:

1. Introduction and critical context (two or three paragraphs). Introduce your topic to readers by placing it into a critical context. There are several different ways to do this. Have critics already discussed the problem or question you are researching? Are there ongoing critical debates about your topic? If so, consider beginning by briefly summarizing what has already been said. (This discussion should then lead into a clear indication of your *own* views, how you're adding to or challenging the existing conversation). Or perhaps your topic has been overlooked in the critical conversation? If so, you might begin by briefly summarizing what critics *have* been interested in in relation to your text (which will then lead into a discussion of what you believed they have overlooked). Or maybe there's some kind of specific background that's important for readers to know to understand your topic—possibly some kind of historical or theoretical background or some information from another field of study that you're applying to your topic. If so, you might begin by providing this background material. The questions you should implicitly answer in your introduction include the following: How does your argument make an interesting contribution to an ongoing critical and perhaps theoretical conversation? Why is it that people interested in your topic need to read your essay? How does your perspective add to our collective understanding of a text or author?
2. Thesis (may be several sentences and should come near the end of your introduction). Clearly state your own argument as a response to the context you established in the first part of your introduction. Your thesis should be arguable (you should be able to imagine someone disagreeing with it); it should be interesting (it should not be something that is obvious); it should be clear and focused (your reader should easily be able to tell what the *point* of your essay will be).

3. Brief Outline. You should include at least five bullet-pointed items that you plan to discuss in your longer paper. These items needn't be long, but they should consist of more than a word or phrase. They should make clear to your reader how you envision that the logical structure of your argument will develop.

Due Dates:

Draft—Monday, March 26

Final Version—Friday, March 30